

- as the not unworthy descendants or successors of a class that has always taken the lead in civilisation and formed the advance guard in the march of national progress.¹

Be it observed, moreover, that at the root of the permanence and popularity of our hereditary peerage is its essentially democratic character. The basis of our social fabric is the principle of civil equality. It is this principle which has 'prevented the nobility of England from degenerating into' a favoured and odious sect.' It is this principle which has placed the Peers at the head of the people and filled the House of Commons with members connected with the Peers by the most intimate ties of birth and blood.

The English nation, to obtain the convenience of monarchy, have established a popular throne, and to enjoy the security of aristocracy, have invested certain orders of their fellow subjects with legislative functions : but these estates, however highly privileged, are invested with no quality of exclusion; and the Peers and the Commons of England are the trustees of the nation, not its masters. The country where the legislative and even the executive office may be constitutionally obtained by every subject of the land, is a democracy, and a democracy of the noblest character. . . . Neither ancient ages, nor the more recent experience of our newer time, can supply us with a parallel instance of a free government, founded on the broadest basis of popular rights, yet combining with democratic liberty, aristocratic security, and monarchical convenience.²

Incidentally Disraeli sets forth his theory of the origin and genius of our English parties — a curious blend of insight and paradox, of which perhaps the paradox will seem less startling when our history has been truly interpreted and freed from the bias it has received from the great Whig historians. The Whigs, according to Disraeli, have always been an anti-national party, always striving to upset the balance of the

i pp. 159,161

² p. 207.